Dark Hollow

By Anna Katharine Green

Illustrations by C. D. Rhodes

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CHAPTER XVIII—Continued.

It had an overwhelming effect upon me. I had been very near death. Suicide must have ended the struggle in which I was engaged, had not this knowledge of actual and unpunished crime come to ease my conscience. John Scoville was worthy of death, and, being so, should receive the full reward of his deed. I need hesitate no longer.

That night I slept. But there came a night when I did not. After the penalty had been paid and to most men's eyes that episode was over, I turned the first page of that volume of slow retribution which is the doom of the man who sins from impulse, and has the recoil of his own nature to face relentlessly to the end of his days. Scoville was in his grave. I was alive. Scoville had shot a man for his money. I had struck a man down in my wrath. Scoville's widow and little child must face a cold and unsympathetic world, with small means and disgrace rising, like a wall, between them and social sympathy, if not between them and the actual means of living.

Oliver's future faced him untouched. No shadow lay across his path to hinder his happiness or to mar his chances.

The results were unequal. I began to see them so, and feel the gnawing of that deathless worm whose ravages lay waste the breast, while hand and brain fulfill their routine of work, as though all were well and the foundations of life unshaken.

I suffered as only cowards suffer. I held on to honor; I held on to home; I held on to Oliver, but with misery for my companion and a self-contempt which nothing could abate. Each time I mounted the bench I felt a tug at my arm as of a visible, restraining presence. Each time I returned to my home and met the clear eye of Oliver beaming upon me with its ever-growing promise of future comradeship, I experienced a rebellion against my own happiness which opened my eyes to my own nature and its inevitable demand. I must give up Oliver, or yield my honors, make a full confession and accept whatever consequences it might bring. I am a proud man, and the latter alternative was beyond me. I could forego pleasure, travel, social intercourse, and even the companionship of the one being in whom all my hopes centered, but I could not, of my own volition, pass from the judge's bench to the felon's cell. There I struck the immovable—the impassable.

I decided in one awful night of renunciation that I would send Oliver out of my life.

The next day I told him abruptly . . . hurting him to spare myself . . . that I had decided after long and mature thought to yield to his desire for journalism, and that I would start him in his career and maintain him in it for three years if he would subscribe to the following conditions:

They were the hardest a loving father ever imposed upon a dutiful and loving son.

First, he was to leave home immediately . . . . within a few hours, in fact.

Second, he was to regard all relations between us as finished; we were to be strangers henceforth in every particular save that of the money obligation already mentioned.

Third, he was never to acknowledge this compact, or to cast any slur upon the father whose reasons for this apparently unnatural conduct were quite disconnected with any fault of his or any desire to punish or reprove.

Fourth, he was to pray for his father every night of his life before he slept.

Was this last a confession? Had I meant it to be such? If so, it missed its point. It awed but did not frighten him.

I had to contend with his compunctions, as well as with grief and dismay. It was an hour of struggle on his part and of implacable resolution on mine. Nothing but such hardness on my part would have served me.

Had I faltered once he would have won me over, and the tale of my sleepless nights been repeated. I did not falter, and when the midnight stroke rang through the house that night it separated by its peal a sin-beclouded but human past from a future arid with solitude and bereft of the one possession to retain which my sin had been hidden.

I became a father without a son—as lonely and as desolate as though the separation between us were that of the grave I had merited and so weakly shunned.

But I was not yet satisfied. How could I insure for myself the extreme punishment which my peace demanded, without bringing down upon me the full consequences I refused to accept.

You have seen how I ultimately answered this question. A convict's bed! a convict's isolation!

But after some weeks of this, fresh fears arose. An accident was possible. For all Bela's precautions, someone might gain access to this room. This would mean the discovery of my secret. And this fence was built.

This should have been enough. But guilt has terrors unknown to innocence. One day I caught a small boy peering through an infinitesimal crack in the fence, and, remembering the window grilled with iron with which Bela had replaced the cheerful casement in my den of punishment, I realized how easily an opening might be made between the boards for the convenience of a curious eye anxious to penetrate the mystery of my seclusion. And so it came about that the inner fence was put up. This settled my position in the town. No more visits. All social life was over. It was meet. I was satisfied at last. I could now give my whole mind to my one remaining duty. I lived only while on the bench

March 5, 1898.

There is a dream which comes to me often—a vision which I often see.

It is that of two broken and irregular walls standing apart against a background of roseate sky. Between these walls the figures of a woman and child, turning about to go.

The bridge I never see, nor the face of the man who died for my sin; but this I see always—the gaunt ruins of Spencer's Folly and the figure of a woman leading away a little child.

That woman lives. I know now who she is. Her testimony was uttered before me in court and was not one to rouse my apprehensions. My crime was unwitnessed by her, and for years she has been a stranger to this town. But I have a superstitious horror of seeing her again, while believing that the day will come when I shall do so. When this occurs—when I look up and find her in my path, I shall know that my sin has found me out and that the end is near.

1909

O shade of Algernon Etheridge, unforgetting and unforgiving! The woman has appeared! She stood in this room today. Verily, years are nothing with God.

Added later.

I thought I knew what awaited me if my hour ever came. But who can understand the ways of Providence or where the finger of retributive justice will point. It is Oliver's name and not mine which has become the sport of calumny. Oliver's! Could the irony of life go further! Oliver's!

There is nothing against him, and such folly must soon die out; but to see doubt in Mrs. Scoville's eyes is horrible in itself and to eliminate it I may have to show her Oliver's account of that long-forgotten night of crime in Spencer's Folly. It is naively written and reveals a clean, if reticent, nature; but that its effect may be unquestionable I will insert a few lines to cover any possible misinterpretation of his manner and conduct. There is an open space, and our handwritings were always strangely alike. Only our e's differed, and I will be careful with the e's.

Her confidence must be restored at all hazards.

My last foolish attempt has undone me. Nothing remains now but that sacrifice of self which should have been made twelve years ago.

CHAPTER XIX.

Sunset.

"I do not wish to seem selfish, Oliver, but sit a little nearer the window where I can see you whenever I open my eyes. Twelve years is a long time to make up, and I have such a little while in which to do it."

Oliver moved. The moisture sprang to his eyes as he did so. He had caught a glimpse of the face on the pillow and the changes made in a week were very apparent. Always erect, his father had towered above them then even in his self-abasement, but he looked now as though twenty years, instead of a few days, had passed over his stately head and bowed his incomparable figure. And not that alone. His expression was different. Had Oliver not seen him in his old likeness for that one terrible half-hour, he would not know these features, so sunken, yet so eloquent with the peace of one for whom all struggle is over, and the haven of his long rest near.

Had he been able at this moment to look beyond the fences which his fear had reared, he would have seen at either gate a silent figure guarding the walk, and recalled, perhaps, the horror of other days when at the contemplation of such a prospect, his spirit recoiled upon itself in unimaginable horror and revolt. And yet, who knows! Life's passions fade when the heart is at peace. And Archibald Ostrander's heart was at peace. Why, his next words will show.

"Oliver"—his voice was low but very distinct, "never have a secret; never hide within your bosom a thought you fear the world to know. If you've done wrong—if you have disobeyed the law either of God or man—seek not to hide what can never be hidden so long as God reigns or men make laws. I have suffered, as few men have suffered and kept their reason intact. Now that my wickedness is known, the whole page of my life defaced, content has come again. I am no longer a deceiver, my very worst is known."

"Oliver?"—This some minutes later. "Are we alone?"

"Quite alone, father. Mrs. Scoville is busy and Reuther—Reuther is in the room above. I can hear her light step overhead."

The judge was silent. He was gazing wistfully at the wall where hung the portrait of his young wife. He was no longer in his room, but in the cheery front parlor. This Deborah had insisted upon. There was, therefore, nothing to distract him from the contemplation I have mentioned.

"There are things I want to say to you. Not many; you already know my story. But I do not know yours, and I cannot die till I do. What took you into the ravine that evening, Oliver, and why, having picked up the stick, did you fling it from you and fly back to the highway? For the reason I ascribed to Scoville? Tell me, that no cloud may remain between us. Let me know your heart as well as you now know mine."

The reply brought the blood back into his fading cheek.

"Father, I have already explained all this to Mr. Andrews, and now I will explain it to you. I never liked Mr. Etheridge as well as you did, and I brooded incessantly in those days over the influence which he seemed to exert over you in regard to my future career. But I never dreamed of doing him a harm, and never supposed that I could so much as attempt any argument with him on my own behalf till that very night of infernal complications and coincidences. The cause of this change was as follows: I had gone up-stairs, you remember, leaving you alone with him as I knew you desired. How I came to be in the room above I don't remember, but I was there and leaning out of the window directly over the porch when you and Mr. Etheridge came out and stood in some final debate on the steps below. He was talking and you were listening, and never shall I forget the effect his words and tones had upon me. I had supposed him devoted to you, and here he was addressing you tartly and in an ungracious manner which bespoke a man very different from the one I had been taught to look upon as superior. The awe of years yielded before this display, and finding him just human like the rest of us, the courage which I had always lacked in approaching him took instant possession of me, and I determined with a boy's unreasoning impulse to subject him to a personal appeal not to add his influence to the distaste you at present felt for the career upon which I had set my heart. Nothing could have been more foolish and nothing more natural, perhaps, than the act which followed. I ran down into the ravine with the wild intention, so strangely duplicated in yourself a few minutes later, of meeting and pleading my cause with him at the bridge, but unlike you, I took the middle of the ravine for my road and not the secluded path at the side. It was this which determined our fate, father, for here I saw the stick and, catching it up without further thought than of the facility it offered for whittling, started with it down the ravine. Scoville was not in sight. The moment was the one when he had quit looking for Reuther and wandered away up the ravine. I have thought since that perhaps the glimpse he had got of his little one peering from the scene of his crime may have stirred even his guilty conscience and sent him off on his purposeless ramble; but, however this was, I did not see him or anybody else as I took my way leisurely down towards the bridge, whittling at the stick and thinking of what I should say to Mr. Etheridge when I met him. And now for fate's final and most fatal touch! Nothing which came into my mind struck me quite favorably. The encounter which seemed such a very simple matter when I first contemplated it, began to assume quite a different aspect as the moment for it approached. By the time I had come abreast of the hollow, I was tired of the whole business, and hearing his whistle and knowing by it that he was very near, I plunged up the slope to avoid him, and hurried straight away into town. That is my story, father. If I heard your steps approaching as I plunged across the path into which I had thrown the stick in my anger at having broken the point of my knife-blade upon it, I thought nothing of them then. Afterwards I believed them to be Scoville's, which may account to you for my silence about this whole matter both before and during the trial. I was afraid of the witness stand and of what might be elicited from me if I once got into the hands of the lawyers. My abominable reticence in regard to his former crime would be brought up against me, and I was too young, too shy and uninformed to face such an ordeal of my own volition. Unhappily, I was not forced into it, and— But we will not talk of that, father."

"Son,"—a long silence had intervened—"there is one thing more. When—how—did you first learn my real reason for sending you from home? I saw that my position was understood by you when our eyes first met in this room. But twelve years had passed since you left this house in ignorance of all but my unnatural attitude towards you. When, Oliver, when?"

"That I cannot answer, father; it was just a conviction which dawned gradually upon me. Now, it seems as if I had known it always; but that isn't so. A boy doesn't reason; and it took reasoning for me to—to accept—"

"Yes, I understand. And that was your secret! Oh, Oliver, I shall never ask for your forgiveness. I am not worthy of it. I only ask that you will not let pride or any other evil passion stand in the way of the happiness I see in the future for you. I cannot take from you the shame of my crime and long deception, but spare me this final sorrow! There is nothing to part you from Reuther now. Alike unhappy in your parentage, you can start on equal terms, and love will do the rest. Say that you will marry her, Oliver, and let me see her smile before I die."

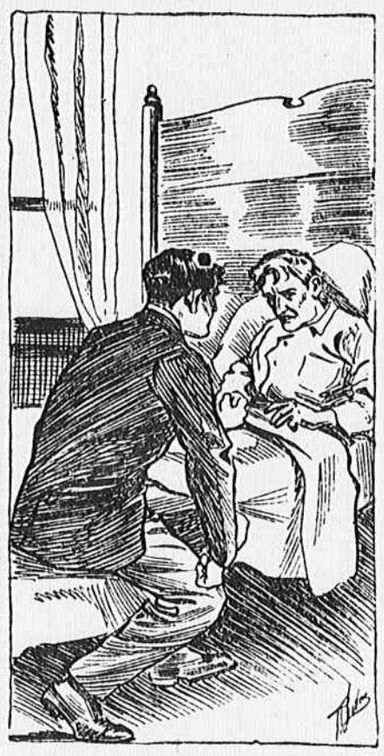
"Marry her? Oh, father, will such an angel marry me?"

"No, but such a woman might."

Oliver came near, and stooped over his father's bed.

"Father, if love and attention to my profession can make a success of the life you prize, they shall have their opportunity."

The father smiled. If it fell to others to remember him as he appeared in his mysterious prime, to Oliver it was given to recall him as he looked then with the light on his face and the



"This Is My Story, Father."

last tear he was ever to shed glittering in his fading eye.

"God is good," came from the bed; then the solemnity of death settled over the room.

The soft footfalls overhead ceased. The long hush had brought the two women to the door where they stood sobbing. Oliver was on his knees beside the bed, his head buried in his arms. On the face so near him there rested a ray from the westering sun; but the glitter was gone from the eye and the unrest from the heart. No more weary vigils in a room dedicated to remose and self-punishment. No more weary circling of the house in the dark lane whose fences barred out the hurrying figure within from every eye but that of heaven. Peace for him; and for Reuther and Oliver, hope!

(THE END.)

Gems That Brought Misery.

The history of diamonds and the many other precious stones, ruby, turquoise, emerald, opal, topaz, sapphire, chrysolite, sardonyx, amethyst, nearly all of which are mentioned in the Scriptures, goes far back of historic times, and is lost in a maze of religion, superstition and legend. It has been intermingled with intrigue, politics and diplomacy; murders galore; scandals unnumbered; imprisonments and beheadings. The story of the "Diamond Necklace," which, possible innocently on her part, smirched the fame of Marie Antoinette was one of the factors in agitation that led to the great French revolution. The Bastile opened to several of the actors in the scandal, one of them Cardinal de Rohan, who was arrested in his robes in the midst of his court. Cagliostro, the famous magician swindler, was another of the Bastile prisoners, and Countess Lamotte-Valois of royal lineage, who was the chief conspirator, for pecuniary gain, escaped from the prison to London, where she died in penury.

Live as in Olden Times.

In eastern Palestine and Arabia are to be found the most picturesque race in the East, those strange, nomadic tribes, the Bedouins.

Their mode of life has not greatly changed since Biblical times, and today they steal cattle and camels, and their young men steal wives, as was their wont in Old Testament days.

Indeed, the purloining of cattle and camels is considered lawful among them, and the more a tribe or an individual can enrich himself in this manner the more their prowess comes to be recognized.

These people, however, who live by thieving and move by stealth, are invariably hospitality itself to the stranger within their gates.

He Knew.

A teacher in a children's institution was giving the geography class a lesson on the cattle ranches. She spoke of their beef all coming from the West, and, wishing to test the children's observation, she asked:

"And what else comes to us from these ranches?"

This was a poser. She looked at her shoes, but no one took the hint. She tried again:

"What do we get from the cattle besides beef?"

One boy eagerly raised his hand.

"I know what it is, it's tripe," he announced triumphantly.

CHANGE IN SOCIAL HABITS

Telephone Has Been Credited With Dispensing With Many of the Former Informalities.

It is really curious to note the change in our social habits that has been brought about by the telephone, the Brooklyn Eagle states. Informal evening visits or afternoon calls have almost disappeared. To "drop in" unannounced in the friendly, old-fashioned way is no longer good form. We "dine out" or we entertain, we are asked to tea or to bridge at a definite hour on a definite day, when we wish to see our friends we send out cards carefully announcing the limited space of hours within which they will be welcome, and woe to that uninitiated out-of-towner who breaks into our date book leaves unheralded by pen or telephone!

We are all so frightfully busy! "You can never get your really nice friends unless you date them up three weeks in advance," is the wail of many a would-be hostess. "What evening next week can you dine with us?" the query goes over the telephone. "Just a moment, dear; let me consult my date book—Monday we have the social service lecture, Tuesday the symphony concert, Wednesday is George's bowling night, Thursday we have the church committee at our house, Friday we are asked to the Millers', Saturday—well, you know we always go to the theater on Saturdays, and Sundays I can't get George to stir out of the house. He insists on going to bed early. I'm awfully sorry, dear; try us again, won't you?"

Justice Cheated of Its Victim.

O. Henry's letter of the man who couldn't get himself arrested was repeated when a young farmer walked into the office of a justice of the peace and announced that he desired to be fined for assault and battery.

"I beat up a fellow, squire," he said, "and I want to stand trial for it."

"But where's the other fellow?" demanded the justice.

"I reckin he's on the road to have me arrested," said the youth, "that's the reason I wanted to get it done first."

The justice explained that to be arrested and tried a man must have a charge filed against him, and advised him to wait until the prosecuting witness arrived.

He waited, but the injured man never arrived and justice was cheated of its victim.

Home Talent.

A man from "upstate" had gone to a theater in New York. In an interval between the acts he turned to the metropolitan who had the seat next to his.

"Where do all them troopers come from?" he inquired.

"I don't think I understand," said the city dweller.

"I mean them actors up yonder on the stage," explained the man from afar. "Was they brought on specially for this show or do they live here?"

"I believe most of them live here in town," said the New Yorker.

"Well, they do purty blamed well for home talent," said the stranger.—Philadelphia Chronicle-Telegraph.

Adamless Eden.

Lady of the House to Wine Agent—I'm sorry, but you've had your trouble for nothing this time. My husband is at the front, and I don't drink wine.

Wine Agent—But, my dear madam, don't forget that in these war times you must always have ready in the house at least a light wine suitable for celebrating victories.

Seasonable.

Knicker—What is a pessimist?

Bocker—A man who believes the snow always drifts on his side of the street.

RIGID OLD SCOTTISH LAWS

All Men at the Age of Usefulness Might Be Called Upon to Defend the Country.

More than half in earnest, newspapers in Scotland have published some "auld Scots laws" that should bring into the field, for home protection at least, many thousands of men and have a special bearing upon the present situation in Britain, an exchange states. These ancient laws go back to the reigns of James II and James II[I] long preceding the union with England, and flourished in the days when "blue bonnets came over the border." These old laws provide in substance:

That all manner of men between sixty and twenty-six be ready to come to the borders and defend the realm.

That all the lieges be ready for war upon eight days' warning to come to the king for defense of the realm.

That neither football nor golf nor sport unprofitable for the defense of the realm is used, but shooting and bow marks as before appointed.

That the old alliance with France be renewed and confirmed.

TOO MUCH OF ONE THOUGHT

French Wine Growers Contributed Little to the Bodily Comfort of Their Beloved Pastor.

There is an old but very good story told of a peasant congregation in the south of France which decided to present its well-beloved pastor with a cask of wine.

The wine of that section is good, and the peasant wine growers are very economical.

The wine is likewise very uniform in quality, and to facilitate the donation it was decided that each contributor should bring in a flagon and empty it into the cask of the good old cure.

The venerable priest was much delighted at this exhibition of generosity.

However, when he came to bottle the cask for winter use only clear spring water ran from the faucet.

Each thrifty contributor had figured that his flagon of water would not be noticed in that cask of generous dimensions.—Bonfort's Wine and Spirit Journal.

More Chances of Excitement.

Old Captain Bowline usually spends his time pottering about in a little sailing boat. Recently, he was chatting with a friend on the subject of his hobby.

"I think I'll get a motor boat next summer," said he.

"Whatever for?" asked his friend. "I thought you were so keen on sailing?"

"Well, I am, but motor boats are much more exciting," replied the hardy old chap. "In a sailing boat you can only drown, while in the other you can be drowned, burned to a cinder by a petrol explosion, or even starved to death if your engine breaks down ten miles from land."

"Safety First."

Elbridge was over at his grandmother's for luncheon. They, knowing how fond he was of cornstarch pudding, had the maid, Louise, make some in individual cups. At luncheon Elbridge refused repeatedly to have any. They coaxed and coaxed, but he wouldn't touch it. All the rest enjoyed it. After luncheon his aunt asked him why he wouldn't eat any of the pudding.

"Well," he said, "when Louise was making it I saw the dog lick one of them, and I didn't know which one it was."

Same Class.

"They tell me the clerk standing yonder with a volume in his hand is a capital salesman."

"Yes, he and the book he is holding are two of our best sellers."